

Mr. THUNE. Mr. Speaker, a couple of weeks ago today, I had the opportunity to present the Medal of Jubilee of Liberty to those South Dakota men who were among those men who stormed, held and kept the beaches of Normandy 55 years ago. From June 6, 1944 until August 31, 1944 these men fought in one of the most historic and pivotal military engagements in American and European history.

Winston Churchill called D-Day the greatest thing that we have ever attempted. Viewed with the benefit of 55 years of history, historians rank the invasion of Normandy as one of the greatest military actions ever on par with the battle of Actium in 31 B.C. that marked the beginning of the Roman Empire, and with the English defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588. It is considered one of the half dozen greatest battles in human history.

I asked someone from my staff to call the men that we were going to be presenting medals to try and get more information about them and their involvement in the Normandy invasion so I could present it at the Memorial Day ceremony.

My staffer made several phone calls and talked to many of the men who were honored at that event but none of them really wanted to talk about their experience. They said that war is a horrible experience and they hoped that no one ever has to go through what they went through on the shores of Normandy.

They also said that really they did not do all that much. They said there were so many others who did so much more, so many buddies who never came home from those beaches. My staffer was amazed at their humility and their reticence.

Humility and reticence are two qualities in rare supply in America today. My staffer has been raised in the TV talk show America where people talk about everything that has ever happened to them all the time, all over the place, over and over again until everyone everywhere knows literally everything about them, and somehow this is considered healthy.

The men who fought in Normandy were raised in a different America. They were raised to do their duty, quietly, humbly, without question or rancor, and then come home again, marry the girl who waited for them, get a job, raise a family and live their lives.

Mr. Speaker, there is a lot of talk in America today about a lack of role models. We have shootings in our schools and people say it is because our young people have no one to look up to. They say that our young people have no heroes. If our young people have no heroes it is because we are looking for heroes in all the wrong places. We are looking for heroes among sports figures and on Hollywood sound stages and in the soldout amphitheaters of pop music concerts. We should be looking for the heroes who

sit across the kitchen table from us. We should be looking for our heroes in the men who read to us and raised us and taught us right from wrong.

The men who fought at Normandy are heroes. They may not be rich and they may not be famous and they would never claim that title for themselves but they are heroes in the truest sense of the word. Many of their friends never came home. Nine thousand men lost their lives in the invasion; 2,500 at Omaha Beach alone; another 2,500 among the American Airborne division; 1,100 Canadians and 3,000 British.

But by the evening of June 6, 1944, Allied power had prevailed all across the Normandy beachhead. More than 100,000 men had come ashore, the first of millions more who would follow.

It is hard to describe horror to those who have never been there. It is hard for those of us who have never been in battle to imagine smoke and death and screaming tracers and the roar of cannon fire. We cannot imagine the horrors that these men have witnessed. We can only see the outcome.

These are the men who freed a continent. These are the men who won a war. These men knew that some things are worth dying for; that democracy is worth dying for; that America is worth dying for. They believed that someone had to stop Hitler. They did it because they had orders to do so. They did it because it was their job.

Webster defines a hero as, quote, a man admired for his achievements or qualities; one that shows great courage, unquote.

These men, the men of the summer of 1944, stormed and secured a beachhead. These men toppled a regime. These men rushed in to save democracy at that crucial moment in history when someone almost succeeded in taking it away. These men are heroes, though they will not admit it.

So the next time, America, that you think your kids do not have any role models and there is no one left to look up to, turn off the TV and look across the kitchen table at your father, your grandfather or your great grandfather and ask them about the war. Ask them what they did. Hear their stories. There are heroes walking in our midst. We need to open our eyes and see them before us and thank them for their courage.

It is my great privilege and honor to be able to recognize those men from my home State of South Dakota who served our country so nobly and so bravely in the summer of 1944 and helped secure the freedom that we enjoy in America today and hope that we will be able to pass it on to the next generation.

SCHOOL CONSTRUCTION LEGISLATION

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. SIMPSON). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 6, 1999, the gentleman from New York (Mr. CROW-

LEY) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the minority leader.

Mr. CROWLEY. Mr. Speaker, I am not so sure I will use all the 60 minutes but we will give it our best.

Mr. Speaker, I rise this evening to discuss the issue of school modernization and construction. I have led the freshman class in fighting for school construction. This past winter we hosted a series of one minutes and a special order like this evening for freshmen to talk about the conditions of our schools in our districts.

Recently, I hosted an education roundtable in my district on this very topic, with our very special guest assistant secretary for education Scott Fleming, and the gentlewoman from New York (Mrs. LOWEY) to whom I am very grateful for her work in the area of school construction and modernization.

I intend to continue my fight to bring school construction legislation to this floor this year, Mr. Speaker.

Last week, the freshman class sent a letter to the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. HASTERT) asking for school construction to be brought up this year. We had Secretary Riley endorsing our request. We had the Democratic leadership and many members of the education community on our side. We are asking for a broad bipartisan support this evening for school modernization and construction.

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Our schools need our help. We need an effective and comprehensive school modernization package that is a Federal, State, and local partnership—a Federal, State and local partnership.

Schools, as part of our Nation's infrastructure, are in desperate need of repair and modernization. If these were our Nation's highways that I was talking about, we probably would not be having this discussion this evening. Well, Mr. Speaker, our schools are our educational highways.

Let me just give my colleagues some examples of some of the problems I am experiencing in my district, and I am sure many of my colleagues around the country are experiencing similar difficulties. Enrollment in the County of Queens in New York City is increasing by 30,000, 30,000 enrollments every 5 years. In 1999, the enrollment is 270,850 students. In the year 2004, that number will rise to 300,000. By year 2007, it is estimated that Queens County will have over 330,000 new students.

In the 7th Congressional District, I represent the most overcrowded school district in the City of New York. School District 24 is operating at over 119 percent of capacity. I have three of the top 10 most overcrowded school districts in the City of New York, District 24, District 30, and District 11 in the Bronx operating at 119, 109 and 107 percent respectively.

By 2007, three of the five most overcrowded schools and school districts will be in the 7th Congressional District, my district. Nearly every school

in Queens will be operating at or over capacity. This is almost unbelievable.

But the average age of a school in New York City is 55 years of age. One out of every five schools in the City of New York is over 75 years of age. Now, when they built these schools back in the 1920s and 1930s, they were built to last; and that is why we have them today. But any school with any normal wear and tear would have to begin to show that wear and tear at least maybe 20 to 30 years after being built.

But our students are going to schools that were built 55 and 75 and some even 100 years ago in the City of New York. They are simply falling apart. These schools need new heating systems to replace unsafe older models. Structural repairs are needed, such as retaining walls, windows, and outside black top, and inside modernization repair such as lights and toilet fixtures.

Let me just add a little point here. That is in schools that maybe 55 to 75 years of age. Some schools will put on additions. Some schools have temporary classrooms, and that space is taking up the space where there once was a school yard where children would have the opportunity to play in recess or to gather before and after school.

The school where I attended kindergarten is PS 229 in Woodside, Queens. Woodside, Queens right now has no playground. Where I played hockey and basketball and grew up, that playground no longer exists. What has taken its place is modular classrooms and now a brand-new wing. It is only my hope that, when the brand-new wing is completed, that they will have a small portion of that playground to be restored to the children so they can use it for recreational purposes.

We need to assist local education agencies, those who know best, whether they need construction, modernization, or technical upgrades. So those who say that the Federal Government should not be in brick and mortars, fine. I think we ought to be involved in brick and mortars. But fine. Let us let the State and local governments handle that. We certainly could be there to help them with financing.

It is interest-free bonds, which will provide the flexibility and cost-effective approach to assist our crumbling schools. Mr. Speaker, I support the Public School Modernization Act of the gentleman from New York (Mr. RANGEL) and the School Construction Act of the gentleman from North Carolina (Mr. ETHERIDGE). Both these acts will drive millions of dollars to New York State and to my congressional district.

The Public School Modernization Act will provide \$22 billion over 2 years in zero interest school modernization bonds. These bills would give 50 percent of the bonds to the 100 school districts with the largest number of low-income students and would give the remaining 50 percent directly to the States.

The Rangel bill would extend Davis-Bacon provisions, which would require payment of prevailing wage rates on all

Federal construction projects, to projects funded through school modernization bond tax credits. I would say this bill would bring over \$2.8 billion in funds to the State of New York and to the City of New York.

The School Construction bill of the gentleman from North Carolina (Mr. ETHERIDGE) will provide \$7.2 billion nationally in school construction bonds to States suffering from rapid school-age population growth and provide the funds needed by States and cities experiencing high rates of growth in suburban and urban school districts. This will bring \$540 million in school construction assistance to the State of New York.

I have been talking about New York State, but obviously the numbers we are talking about here extend across this great land in other areas that are experiencing high growth, and other school districts of high levels of impoverished children would also receive a great share of the assistance provided through school modernization bonds.

Both of these bills will help reduce the heavy burden on our local property taxpayers by offering school districts tax-free bonds.

Let me just give my colleagues a couple of national facts. One-third of the Nation's schools were built before World War II and are still in operation. One-third were built before World War II. There is currently a \$112 billion backlog in school construction and modernization needs, \$112 billion. Sixty percent of our Nation's schools have at least one major building feature in need of extensive repair. Think about that, 60 percent of our schools in this Nation have at least one major building feature in need of extensive repair.

Fifty-eight percent of the Nation's schools have at least one unsatisfactory environmental condition such as poor ventilation or poor heating. In fact, in some schools in Queens County and in my district and in the City of New York, they are still burning coal, still burning coal. We are going into the 21st Century still burning coal. Amazing.

In my home district and in many of our schools, we are heading into the 21st Century, and we are facing an enormous lack of seats. If we do nothing, if we do not help our local government, Queens County will be facing between 20,000 and 60,000 seats that they will be shy by the year 2007, between 20,000 and 60,000 seats shy.

The City of New York and the State of New York are doing all they can to provide funds for school construction and modernization, making schools and classrooms ready for the 21st Century, providing computers, providing access to the Internet, providing cable-ready classrooms. They simply cannot keep up with the pace.

Ellis Island no longer exists in terms of welcoming new immigrants to this great country. What has taken its place is Queens County. My borough has seen a tremendous growth in the

past few years, and that is going to continue to take plates in the coming century. In fact, while most of the rest of the city and the other boroughs will be seeing a decline in student growth population, Queens County will be seeing a massive, massive growth. Much of that is due to the baby boom era. Due to the baby boom echo, school enrollment has now reached an all-time record high of 52.7 million in this Nation.

To meet rising school enrollments, 6,000 new schools will be needed to be built over the next 10 years in order to meet that challenge. I ask my colleagues, if this is not crisis, what is? If this issue does not ring with them, what will?

I urge Speaker HASTERT to bring school construction legislation such as the bills of the gentleman from New York (Mr. RANGEL) or the gentleman from North Carolina (Mr. ETHERIDGE) to the floor for debate as soon as possible.

As we ready ourselves for the 21st Century, we have to ask ourselves, have we done all we can do to prepare our students for the next millennium. In fact, not the next millennium, the next century? In fact, have we done all we can do, not for the next century, but for the next decade? Are we really doing all we can do to help prepare our students just for the next decade?

Our schools can no longer wait for that answer. Mr. Speaker, we must act today.

ENCOURAGING FAIR AND OPEN DEBATE ON PATIENT PROTECTION LITIGATION

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. SIMPSON). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 6, 1999, the gentleman from Iowa (Mr. GANSKE) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the majority leader.

Mr. GANSKE. Mr. Speaker, another week has gone by, and this House of Representatives has done nothing again to address the abuses in the HMO industry. I have been coming to the well of this House for 4 years to encourage the leadership of Congress to allow a fair and open debate on patient protection legislation.

Every time, I point out the HMO abuses, like the HMO abuse that cost this woman her life, or the HMO decision that cost this little boy both his hands and both his feet, like the HMO decisions that a child born with a birth defect like this, complete cleft lip and palate is a cosmetic defect, and they will not cover the cost of repair.

Every week I talk about patients like this, this woman who fell off a 40-foot cliff, and her HMO refused to pay for her hospitalization even though she had a broken skull, broken arm, broken pelvis, because she had not phoned ahead for prior authorization.